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Message Text

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INFO USCINCSO
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 4 PANAMA 5536

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: MASS, MILI, PN
SUBJECT: ASSESSMENT OF US SECURITY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS FOR FY 1979

REF: STATE 133136

1. OUR SECURITY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM IS INEXTRICABLY INTERWOVEN WITH OUR EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH A NEW TREATY RELATIONSHIP, AND THUS WITH OUR WHOLE POLICY TOWARD PANAMA. WE HAVE A POLICY, ELABORATED IN THE TACK-KISSINGER AGREEMENT OF 1974 WHEREBY PANAMA WOULD, DURING THE LIFE OF THE NEW TREATY, PARTICIPATE INCREASINGLY WITH THE US IN THE DEFENSE OF THE CANAL. THIS POLICY MAKES OUR MILITARY ASSISTANCE OF PANAMA A VERY SPECIAL CASE. ITS AIM IS TO CREATE AN EFFICIENT MILITARY FORCE IN A COUNTRY WHICH HERETOFORE HAS VIRTUALLY NOT HAD ARMED FORCES AT ALL. FORCE DEVELOPMENT WILL ENABLE PANAMA TO COOPERATE EFFECTIVELY IN THE PROTECTION OF A US NATIONAL SECURITY INTEREST IN THE PANAMA CANAL.

2. FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE EXERCISE GREAT CARE IN GUIDING PANAMANIAN MILITARY DEVELOPMENT-- TO THE EXTENT THAT WE CAN EXERCISE GUIDANCE. FIRST, WE CONFIDENTIAL

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MUST MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO SEE THAT PANAMA IS PREPARING FOR DEFENSE AGAINST THE MOST LIKELY THREATS--NOT THE THREATS OF THE PAST. SECOND, WE SHOULD SEEK TO AVOID, TO THE EXTENT POSSIBLE, THE APPEARANCE THAT THE US IS ARMING THE NATIONAL GUARD AGAINST THE PANAMANIAN POPULACE. THIRD, WE SHOULD AVOID PROVIDING PANAMA WITH HARDWARE WHICH EITHER IT CANNOT MAINTAIN OR IS MARGINAL

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FROM A MILITARY STANDPOINT. FOURTH, WE SHOULD ENCOURAGE PANAMA TO AVOID UNNECESSARY MILITARY EXPENDITURES; IT WILL NEED ALL THE MONEY IT CAN GET FOR ITS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. FIFTH, WE SHOULD AVOID THE CREATION OF REGIONAL MILITARY IMBALANCE, ESPECIALLY WITH COSTA RICA. SIXTH, WE SHOULD AVOID POLICIES THAT ENCOURAGE PANAMA TO SEEK SOURCES OF SUPPLY OTHER THAN THE US. AND, FINALLY, WE SHOULD NOT EXPECT TOO MUCH; THE NATIONAL GUARD IS ESSENTIALLY A POLICE FORCE. THE AMOUNT OF TRAINING AND EQUIPMENT THAT WE COULD REASONABLY PROVIDE IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS WOULD BE INSUFFICIENT TO TURN IT INTO A SERIOUS FIGHTING FORCE.

3. RELATIONS BETWEEN THE NATIONAL GUARD AND THE US ARMED SERVICES HAVE BEEN COOL IN RECENT YEARS. A GENEROUS AND WELL THOUGHT OUT (BUT NOT OVERLY PATERNALISTIC) PROGRAM OF MILITARY ASSISTANCE IS OF FUNDAMENTAL IMPORTANCE IN CREATING THE HARMONIOUS RELATIONSHIP US FORCES WILL NEED DURING THE PERIOD OF OUR PRIMARY RESPON-SIBILITY FOR CANAL DEFENSE.

4. THE FOLLOWING REMARKS ARE KEYED TO THE QUESTIONS IN PARAGRAPH 4 OF REFTEL:

A. THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT SEES NO IMMEDIATE EXTERNAL THREAT TO ITSELF. IT DOES, HOWEVER, BELIEVE THAT THE CONFIDENTIAL

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PANAMA CANAL IS VULNERABLE TO A VERIETY OF THREATS--PRIMARILY SABOTAGE OR GUERRILLA ATTACK, BUT CONCEIVABLY ARMED ATTACK BY A FOREIGN POWER. IT BELIEVES THE EXISTENCE OF US MILITARY INSTALLATIONS ON THE ISTHMUS INCREASES THE THREAT TO THE CANAL. IT HAS THUS SOUGHT TO NEGOTIATE A TREATY WITH THE US WHICH WOULD LEAD TO THE GRADUAL REDUCTION OF OUR MILITARY PRESENCE; AND IT PLANS TO INCREASE THE NATIONAL GUARD'S CAPABILITY TO MEET THE REDUCED THREAT ONCE WE ARE GONE. THE GUARD HAS NOT DEVISED A SPECIFIC STRATEGY FOR MEETING THAT THREAT, THOUGH THEIR RECENTLY DEVELOPED FIVE-YEAR PLAN (PANAMA 5343) WOULD INDICATE THAT IT HAS DEVELOPED SOME PREL-IMINARY PRIORITIES. WE BELIEVE THAT THESE PLANS ARE FAR FROM FIRM AND HAVE NOT BEEN FULLY THOUGHT OUT. THE EMBASSY AGREES WITH THE GOP THAT THE THREAT TO THE CANAL WILL DIMINISH ONCE A MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE TREATY HAS GONE INTO EFFECT. THE PRINCIPAL CURRENT THREAT TO THE CANAL--SABOTAGE BY PANAMANIANS OR OTHER RESIDENTS OF THE ISTHMUS--WILL DIMINISH SHARPLY ONCE THE UNCERTAINTY AND TENSION ARISING FROM THE PRESENT TREATY ARRANGEMENT DISAPPEARS. IN OUR JUDGMENT THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT SHOULD HAVE A STRONG INTERNAL SECURITY CAPACITY AND A SMALL, MOBILE

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LIGHT INFANTRY FORCE WITH GOOD LOGISTICAL/MAINTENANCE
SUPPORT. IS SHOULD ALSO HAVE A NAVY (COAST GUARD)
CAPABLE OF CONTROLLING SMUGGLING AND SMALL-PARTY LANDINGS
OF SABOTEURS AND AN AIR FORCE TO PROVIDE TROOP TRANSPORT
SERVICE TO THE GUARDIA AND CIVIC ACTION SERVICES TO THE
MANY ISOLATED AREAS IN PANAMA. IN CASE OF A LARGER
MILITARY THREAT, THE GUARD SHOULD BE CAPABLE OF ASSISTING
US FORCES IN DEFENSE OF THE CANAL.

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B. IN TIME OF HOSTILITIES ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD, THE
CANAL COULD BECOME THE OBJECT OF ATTACK OR SABOTAGE.
THUS, THERE IS A MILITARY JUSTIFICATION FOR SECURITY
ASSISTANCE TO PANAMA. POLITICALLY, THERE IS A STRONG
JUSTIFICATION FOR PROVIDING SUCH ASSISTANCE AT INCREASED
LEVELS, SINCE THE TREATY SETTLEMENT WILL INCLUDE PANAM-
ANIAN PARTICIPATION IN THE PROTECTION AND DEFENSE OF
THE CANAL. UNDER THE NEW TREATY WE WILL CERTAINLY WANT
THE BEST POSSIBLE WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH THE NATIONAL
GUARD. WE WILL ALSO WANT IT TO BE EQUIPPED, ORGANIZED
AND DOCTRINALLY ORIENTED ALONG US LINES. WE SEE NO
SIGNIFICANT LIKELIHOOD OF A THREAT TO PANAMA FROM A NEIGH-
BORING COUNTRY--PARTICULARLY SINCE THE US WILL HAVE A
PRIMARY DEFENSE ROLE HERE FOR A GOOD MANY YEARS TO COME.

C. AS NOTED IN SUBPARAGRAPH "A" ABOVE, THE PANAMANIAN
GOVERNMENT HAS NOT DEVISED A WELL THOUGHT OUT DEFENSE
STRATEGY. AS A NEW TREATY ARRANGEMENT EMERGES, THE
MILGROUP WILL BE INCREASINGLY INVOLVED IN SEEKING TO HELP

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SHARPEN THE GOP'S FOCUS ON THIS. THE PANAMANIAN MILITARY
IS TRYING TO CAPITALIZE ON THE US DESIRE FOR A NEW TREATY
AND THEIR TACTICAL FORCES DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY IS DESIGNED TO
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OBTAIN A LARGE ARMS PACKAGE FOR TREATY-RELATED
COMBINED DEFENSE, AS WELL AS NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT.
THEIR PLAN IS REFERRED TO AS THE "FIVE YEAR
PLAM" THE GUARD HAS EXPANDED THE FORMER 10 YEAR FORCE
DEVELOPMENT PLAN BY INCLUDING UNREALISTIC REQUIREMENTS
FOR AIRCRAFT (A-7 OR A-37) AND SHIPS THAT ARE BEYOND
THEIR CAPABILITY TO EITHER MAN OR MAINTAIN. IN COM-
PARISON, THE WRITTEN PORTION OF THEIR GROUND FORCE
DEVELOPMENT PLAN (TWO BATTALIONS) IS MORE REALISTIC
AND DESIRABLE. THEIR LONG-TERM GROUND FORCE ASPIRATION
OF FIVE BATTALIONS APPEARS EXCESSIVE. THE GUARD'S FIVE
YEAR PLAN WAS THE SUBJECT OF A RECENT DISCUSSION BETWEEN
CINCSOUTH AND THE GUARD G-3. AS A RESULT OF THIS MEETING,
A WORKING GROUP, WITH REPRESENTATIVES FROM SOUTHCOM,
MILGP PANAMA AND THE GUARD WILL, JOINTLY, REVIEW THE PLAN
WITH THE OBJECTIVE OF FORMULATING A MORE REALISTIC AND
COMPLETE DEVELOPMENT PLAN WITH SUPPORTABLE MILITARY RE-
QUIREMENTS FOR CANAL DEFENSE. FURTHERMORE, THERE
IS THE POSSIBILITY THE GUARD MAY SEEK TO OBTAIN EQUIP-
MENT WHICH IS PRIMARILY AIMED AT CONTROL OF THE PANAM-
ANIAN POPULATION OR FOR REASONS OF NATIONAL PRIDE AND
PRESTIGE. IT IS NOT OUR INTENTION TO COOPERATE IN THE
BUILDING UP OF ARMED FORCES FOR SUCH UNDESIRABLE PURPOSES.
BUT, WE WILL HAVE A HEAVY OBLIGATION TO HELP
PANAMA DEVELOP ITS CAPACITY TO DEFEND THE CANAL.

D. THE PRESENT AND PROJECTED STATE OF GUARD FORCE
DEVELOPMENT AND CREDIT PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH FMS
ARREARAGES MAKE IT REASONABLE TO ASSUME THAT THE GUARD
WILL STILL BE TRYING TO EQUIP ITS FIRST INFANTRY
BATTALION IN FY79. AIR FORCE AND NAVY DEVELOPMENT WILL
BE IN A SIMILAR EMBRYONIC STAGE. NO CO-PRODUCTION IS
FORESEEN OR RECOMMENDED FOR PANAMA. ARMS REQUIRED FOR
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FY79 WOULD INCLUDE:

(1) GROUND FORCES. THE PRINCIPAL NEED WILL BE ARMS TO
COMPLETE THE ACTIVATION OF THE 1ST GN INFANTRY BATTALION.
THE BATTALION COMMAND SECTION AND THE HEADQUARTERS/SUPPORT
COMPANY WILL PROBABLY STILL REQUIRE EQUIPMENT TO COMPLETE

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BATTALION ACTIVATION, TO INCLUDE:

WEAPONS	QUANTITY
4.2 IN MORTAR	4
MACHINE GUN, CAL .50	4

VEHICLES	
TRUCK, UTILITY, 1/4 TON, M151	29
TRAILER, CARGO, M416	29
TRUCK, CARGO, 5/4 TON M715	9
TRAILER, CARGO, M701A1	9
TRUCK, AMBULANCE, 5/4 TON, TACTICAL M809	4
TRUCK, CARGO, 2-1/2TON, M35A2	20
TRAILER, CARGO, M105A2	16
TRAILER, WATER, M149A1	4
TRUCK, FUEL, M49A2C	2
TRUCK, VAN, EXPANSIBLE, 2-1/2 TON, M292A1	3
WRECKER, 5TON, M543A2	1

COMMUNICATIONS	
RADIO SET, AN/PRC-77	6
RADIO SET, AN/VRC-47	4
RADIO SET, AN/GRC-106	3
TELEPHONE SET, TA312	23
CABLE, TELEPHONE, DR/8	12
REELING MACHINE, CABLE, HAND	6
SWITCHBOARD, SB22	2
SWITCHBOARD, SB993	3
TELETYPE, AN/FGC-25	1
RADIO SET, AN/VRC-49	5

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RADIO SET, AN/VRC-44	3
RADIO SET, AN/VRC-46	7
RADIO SET, AN/GRC-160	17

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THESE ITEMS WILL PROVIDE THE COMMAND AND CONTROL SYSTEMS, LOGISTICAL SUPPORT, MINIMUM INDIRECT FIRE SUPPORT AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SUPPORT FOR A LIGHT INFANTRY BATTALION. THIS EQUIPMENT WILL BE SUPPLEMENTED BY SUFFICIENT INDIV-IDUAL WEAPONS AND EQUIPMENT TO OUTFIT THE SOLDIERS IN THE COMPANY.

PANAMA APPARENTLY INTENDS TO USE THE MAJORITY OF THIS BATTALION AS ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE COMBINED DEFENSE FORCE FOR THE PANAMA CANAL. THE EQUIPMENT FOR THIS BATTALION IS A SYSTEM THAT IS REALISTICALLY ORIENTED TO PANAMA'S NEEDS AND IS REQUIRED FOR PANAMA TO FIELD AN INFANTRY BATTALION.

(2) NAVY.

ITEM	QUANTITY
85 FT PATROL BOAT	1
LCM-8	2
20MM GUN, AMMO AND PARTS	1
50 CAL MACHINE GUN, AMMO AND PARTS	4

THE NAVY EQUIPMENT WILL ENABLE PANAMA TO CONTINUE THE CONFIDENTIAL

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COAST GUARD AND CIVIC ACTION THRUST OF ITS NAVAL DEVELOPMENT. PANAMA IS A MAJOR TRANSSHIPMENT POINT FOR DRUGS AND CONTRA-BAND, AND PANAMA NEEDS TO IMPROVE ITS CAPABILITY TO PATROL ITS TERRITORIAL WATERS. TRANSPORTATION SERVICES FOR CIVIC ACTION PROJECTS IS A MAJOR ACTIVITY OF THE NAVY, AND PANAMA WILL CONTINUE TO EMPLOY ITS UTILITY CRAFT ON A DAILY BASIS IN THIS ROLE.

(3) AIR FORCE. THE AMOUNT AND TYPE OF EQUIPMENT THAT THE PANAMA AIR FORCE (FAP) MAY SEEK TO ACQUIRE IN FY79 IS BASED ON MANY AND VARIED PROBABILITIES AND UNCERT-AINTIES. PANAMA'S FIVE YEAR PLAN IS EXCESSIVE AND OUR ESTIMATES OF EQUIPMENT THAT THE FAP MIGHT SEEK TO OBTAIN IN FY79 DOES NOT REFLECT THE A-7 AND A-37S IN

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THIS PLAN. WE DO REFLECT PRIOR YEAR THINKING AS DOC-
UMENTED BY OUR INPUT TO THE MSAP AND JSOP THAT (DESPITE
SLIPPATE) PROGRAMS THE ACQUISITION OF AIRCRAFT MORE IN
KEEPING WITH PANAMA'S NEEDS. THE BEST ESTIMATE TODAY
IS THAT THE FAP MAY BE PERSUADED TO SEEK TWO (2) UH-1N
HELICOPTERS AND ONE (1) L-188A (LOCKHEED ELECTRA).
FINANCING PROBLEMS HAVE CAUSED THE FAP TO POSTPONE
PLAN FOR ACQUISITION OF A C-130 AIRCRAFT, WHICH UP
UNTIL RECENTLY HAD BEEN IN THE FY79 PLAN.

(4) FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENT. FMS FINANCING IS RECOM-
MENDED UNLESS SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS (E.G., GRANTS, SUPPORT-
ING ASSISTANCE) SHOULD BE PROVIDED IN THE TREATY CONTEXT.
PANAMA'S ECONOMIC SITUATION IS SUCH THAT THE FORECASTED
MILITARY DEVELOPMENT IS UNLIKELY TO BE FEASIBLE WITHOUT
SOME FORM OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE.

E. THE FY79 PANAMANIAN PURCHASE OF MILITARY SUPPLIES
AND EQUIPMENT PROPOSED IN PARA 4 E WOULD HAVE NO SIG-
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NIFICANT IMPACT ON PANAMA'S ECONOMY, THE GOP'S DEBT
SERVICING CAPACITY, OR ITS DEVELOPMENT PLAN--ASSUMING
FMS CREDIT TERMS OF, E.G., FIVE YEARS. AT AN ESTIMATED
VALUE OF $5-6 MILLION, THE PURCHASE WOULD ADD NO MORE
THAN $1 MILLION ANNUALLY TO PANAMA'S DEFENSE BURDEN--
LITTLE MORE THAN 5 PERCENT OF THE ESTIMATED $15 MILLION PANAMA
IS SPENDING CURRENTLY FOR DEFENSE. THIS AMOUNT WOULD
BE OF MINOR SIGNIFICANCE EVEN IN THE FACE OF THE GOP'S
BURDENSOME DEBT SERVICING REQUIREMENTS, WHICH CURRENTLY
TOTAL WELL OVER $150 MILLION ANNUALLY. MOREOVER, PANAMA'S
DEFENSE BURDEN WOULD REMAIN BELOW 1 PERCENT OF GROSS
DOMESTIC PRODUCT, COMPARED TO 2-4 PERCENT FOR MOST LDC'S AND
1-2 PERCENT FOR MOST OF CENTRAL AMERICA.

F. NO USG OR CIVILIAN CONTRACT PERSONNEL ARE FORESEEN
FOR PANAMA. PANAMA DOES NOT HAVE THE RESOURCES TO
EXPEND ON CONTRACT TECHNICAL SERVICES AND THE PLANNED
PURCHASES SHOULD BE WITHIN THE TECHNICAL CAPABILITIES
OF THE GUARD.

G. THE EQUIPMENT RECOMMENDED IN PARA 4 E IS UNSOPHIS-
TICATED AND COMPARABLE EQUIPMENT IS READILY AVAILABLE
FROM OTHER COUNTRIES. PANAMA HAS EXPRESSED A STRONG
PREFERENCE FOR US EQUIPMENT. THE VERY CONCEPT OF
COMBINED DEFENSE AND THE EXISTING LOGISTICAL SUPPORT
BASE IN THE CANAL ZONE MAKES ACQUISITION OF COMPATIBLE
US EQUIPMENT LOGICAL TO PANAMA. A US FAILURE TO MEET
PANAMA'S RELATIVELY UNSOPHISTICATED DEFENSE ASPIRATIONS
WOULD PROBABLY FORCE PANAMA TO SEEK OTHER SUPPLIERS AND

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TO QUESTION OUR SINCERITY IN THE COMBINED DEFENSE PLEDGE.
FURTHERMORE, WE BELIEVE THE GOP WILL PERSIST IN ITS
DESIRE TO OBTAIN SOME JET AIRCRAFT. WE WILL ATTEMPT TO
PERSUADE THEM THAT THIS ACQUISIITION IS NOT IN THEIR
BEST INTERESTS.

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H. THE RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT DOES NOT APPEAR TO HAVE
ANY ARMS CONTROL IMPACT. COLOMBIA HAS MORE ADVANCED
EQUIPMENT; COSTA RICA DOES NOT. (BUT SEE PARA 2 ABOVE
FOR MEDIUM TERM (1980'S) CONCERN VIS-A-VIS COSTA RICA.
PANAMA'S FIVE YEAR PLAN MIGHT HAVE ARMS CONTROL IMPACT IN
TERMS OF REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS.)

I. THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IS PANAMA IS ESSENTIALLY
UNCHANGED. IN SEPTEMBER 1976 THE GOVERNMENT OF PANAMA
WAS FORCED TO PUT DOEN STUDENT RIOTS, AND ITS MANNER OF
DOING SO WAS SUBJECT TO SOME CRITICISM. IN THE SPRING
OF 1977 IT REVIEWED THE NAMES OF POLITICAL EXILES AND
DECIDED TO PERMIT MORE THAN HALF TO RETURN TO PANAMA IF
THEY WISHED. WE DOUBT THAT PROVIDING EQUIPMENT AND
TRAINING IN IMPLEMENTATION OF OUR POLICY WILL HAVE MUCH
IMPACT ON HUMAN RIGHTS HERE. THIS IS NOT TO SAY THAT,
IF THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT SHOULD TAKE A REPRESSIVE
TURN, MILITARY EQUIPMENT PROVIDED UNDER THE PROGRAMS
MIGHT NOT BE USED AGAINST PANAMANIAN CITIZENS.

J. PANAMA DOES NOT HAVE THE CAPABILITY TO BE AN ARMS
SUPPLIER; ITS COOPERATION AS A PURCHASER IS DIRECTLY
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RELATED TO THE US CAPABILITY TO HELP PANAMA MEET ITS
MINIMUM ASPIRATIONS (SEE 4G ABOVE).

K. THE CURRENT IMET PROGRAM IS ORIENTED TOWARD PRO-
FESSIONAL RATHER THAN EQUIPMENT-RELATED TRAINING.
THIS ORIENTATION HAS BEENPARTIALLY CAUSED BY THE
CANCELLATION OF MANY TECHNICAL COURSES PREVIOUSLY
OFFERED BY CANAL ZONE SCHOOLS. UNFORTUNATELY, LIMITED
RESOURCES MAKE IT DIFFICULT FOR PANAMA TO DEVELOP ITS OWN
EQUIPMENT-RELATED COURSES. THESE SAME RESOURCE LIMITATIONS
MAKE IT HIGHLY UNLIKELY THAT PANAMA WILL PURCHASE EITHER
EQUIPMENT-RELATED OR PROFESSIONAL TRAINING FROM THE US UNDER
FMS. THE HIGH COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH THIS TRAINING AND THE
COSTS OF THE PREREQUISITE LANGUAGE TRAINING WILL PRECLUDE
PANAMA FROM PURCHASING FMS TRAINING IN MOST INSTANCES. PANAMA
IS AN ENTHUSIASTIC SUPPORTER OF AND SUBSCRIBER TO THE CANAL
ZONE SCHOOLS AND WILL CONTINUE TO SEND STUDENTS TO THE SCHOOLS.
PANAMA WILL CONTINUE TO SEND SELECTED STUDENTS TO THE US UNDER
IMET FOR COURSES NOT AVAILABLE IN THE CANAL ZONE. AS THE
GUARDIA NACIONAL EXPANDS THERE MAY BE SOME EXPANSION FOR STATE-
SIDE IMET TRAINING FOR CRITICALLY NEEDED TRAINING, FOR
EXAMPLE, COAST GUARD OCS. WHEREEVER POSSIBLE, HOWEVER, PANAMA
WILL OPT FOR THE CHEAPER ZONE SCHOOLS IN ORDER TO STRETCH THE
IMET DOLLAR. PANAMA CURRENTLY PAYS THE TRAVEL AND LIVING
ALLOWANCES FOR STUDENTS ATTENDING IMED TRAINING.

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